1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

22 502 Despite their poverty in propelling devices, the Seri navigate their waters successfully and extensively. Perhaps the commonest function of the craft is that exercised in connection with the turtle fishery, though its chief office as a factor of general industrial economy is that of bridging El Infiernillo at the will of the roving clans. It is by means of this craft, also, that the semiceremonial pelican feasts on Tiburon are consummated; it is by the same means that Isla Patos, Isla Turner, Roca Foca, and other insulated sources of food-supply are habitually reached; and both Mashém's accounts and the Jesuits' records indicate that occasional voyages are pushed to San Esteban, San Lorenzo, Angel de la Guarda, and even to the Baja California coast.

Concordantly with the tribal customs, little freight is carried. The traveling family transport their poor possessions to the shore, bring out the balsa from its hiding place in the thick and thorny fog-shrubbery, launch it, lade it with a filled olla and the weapons of a man and implements of a woman, besides any chance food and clothing, and embark lightly to enjoy the semirepose of drifting before the breeze—until the rising gale brings labor still more arduous than that of scouring the spall-strewn slopes or sandy stretches of their hard motherland. Commonly the terminus of the trip is fixed largely by the chance of wind and tide; and when it is reached the party carry the craft inshore, conceal it shrewdly, and then take up their birdskin bed and walk forth in search of fresh water and meat. The successful fishing trips of course end in orgies of gorging, and when the voyage is the climax of a foray to the mainland frontier for stock-stealing, the quarters and paunches and heads hastily thrown aboard at the mainland side of the strait are carried to the rancherias for consumption at leisure; and this has happened so often that equine hoofs and bovine bones are common constituents of the middens on Tiburon.

171 501 Although measurably similar to Central American and South American types of water-craft, the Seri balsa is a notably distinct type for its region. The California natives, as well as those of the mainland of Mexico south of Rio Yaqui, used rafts made either of palm trunks or of other logs lashed alongside rather than balsas; while the far-traveling tribes used either sails or well-differentiated paddles for propulsion.

501 Briefly, the Seri balsa is remarkable for perfect adaptation to those needs of its makers shaped by their distinctive environment. It seems to approach the ideal of industrial economy—the acme of practicality—in the adjustment of materials and forces to the ends of a lowly culture; and, like the olla and harpoon and arrow, it affords an impressive example of the adjustment of artifacts to environment through the intervention of budding intelligence. Yet the chief significance of the craft would seem to reside in its vestigial character as a survival of that orarian stage in the course of human development

8: Ascher E-5 (1960) 1962 NU31 Seri NU31

Elsewhere (Ascher 1961) I have disputed this portrayal of the potential of existing ethnography, citing examples where qualitative and quantitative models have been constructed from ethnography and suggesting that one task for archeology is to codify the literature in a manner useful to itself. Regardless of doubts about existing ethnographies for archeological purposes, the worth of future ethnography for archeology will depend on the acquisition of the relevant kinds of information. Although discussion on the subject has been recorded (Tax *et al.* 1953: 229-232), no specific guides have been produced. This paper provides and discusses an example, which can be used as a paradigm, model, or guide of the kind of information to be collected from ongoing communities which would be of general value for archeology. The subject culture is that of the Seri Indians of Sonora, Mexico; the example describes a persistent trait complex associated with fishing for the Pacific green turtle, with particular emphasis on one trait in the complex, the harpoon foreshaft.

Example from the Seri Indians

The Seri, who numbered approximately 200 individuals in 1960, occupy a band of coastal desert about four miles wide and seventy miles long in the state of Sonora in western Mexico. The band extends along the Gulf of California from Kino Bay in the south to Desemboque in the north, opposite the largest island in the Gulf, Tiburon. Although the region is desert, with an estimated average rainfall of less than eight inches per year, falling mostly in July and August, it is comparatively rich in succulents and small land mammals. The Gulf forms a natural trap for large fish and marine mammals and is a breeding ground for the Pacific green turtle. The scantiness of fresh water has constituted, in the past and present alike, the single crucial limiting factor to agriculture and human occupancy.

In the past the Seri may have comprised from four to six tribal groups, and they were certainly numerically larger, with a maximum estimated population of 2,000 (Kroeber 1931: 53, 30). Until very recently they also occupied Tiburon Island, and at some more remote period they extended south, north, and east over a territory whose bounds are uncertain (Kroeber 1931: 5). On the basis of linguistic change, Kroeber (1931: 54) calculated that the Seri could have inhabited this general region for 1,000 years. It is uncertain whether the original occupation stemmed from Baja California via the Gulf of California or from the north and west via an overland route or routes (Kroeber 1931: 39-51). The first contact with Europeans occurred as early as 1540 (McGee 1898: 51).

In culture content the Seri are most closely affiliated with the Pima (Kroeber 1931: 51), but they do not share the practice of agriculture with them or with their western neighbors. The Seri are primarily fishermen; secondarily they gather the fruits of succulents; and to a still lesser extent they hunt game. McGee (1898: 214)